



January 16, 2007

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Ravalli County Commissioners

I thought the following information might be of interest to you. Please call my toll-free number, 800-332-6106, if you have any questions regarding this fax.

Max Baucus

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

January 9, 2007

The Honorable Mark Keenum
Under Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Farm & Foreign Agriculture Services
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-0003

Dear Under Secretary Keenum:

We are writing regarding the proposal to close eight Farm Service Agency (FSA) county offices in Montana. We believe that these closures will harm farmers and ranchers without providing increased efficiencies. We do not believe it is wise to close these offices, and urge you to reconsider this proposal.

We understand the importance of efficiency and cost savings. However, from what we can see, eliminating eight offices will cut a necessary service to large segments of the agriculture community and provide minimal cost savings.

FSA offices provide valuable assistance to farmers and ranchers for farm programs and compliance with regulations. Shutting down local FSA offices would hurt Montana ag producers by decreasing their access to federal agriculture programs. Additionally, this change comes at a time when the basic structure of production agriculture could see serious and monumental changes.

FSA's plan appears to rely on a computer system and technology that hasn't worked well in the past. Even with a workable FSA online system, many in rural Montana do not have access to the internet.

We are also concerned that this plan relies upon employees relocating to shared offices. If employees choose not to relocate, offices left open will see no increase in efficiencies.

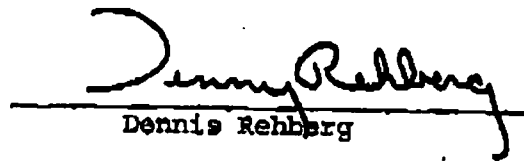
Finally, as the process continues, we ask that the public be given the opportunity to comment on closures. At a minimum, farmers, ranchers and interested community members should be allowed to fully participate in meetings. Furthermore, we believe that appropriations language requires that before any offices are closed, open meetings must be held in the county where the office will be closed.

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We take the closure of these FSA offices seriously, and realize that once closed, these offices will likely never reopen. We ask you to reconsider your proposal.

Sincerely,


Max Baucus
Jon Tester
Dennis Rehberg

cc: Randy Johnson, Executive Director
Montana Farm Service Agency